Department for Education

WITHDRAWN

Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England

Equalities impact assessment of the final list of qualifications that overlap with wave 3 T Levels

October 2023

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Introduction

Following the Prime Minister's announcement of plans to develop the Advanced British Standard, we are continuing our ambitious technical education reforms to post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below. The reforms will streamline and strengthen the technical offer and provide greater clarity for students. We want all publicly funded qualifications to be high quality and lead to good outcomes so that all students leave education with the skills employers need.

The first phase of the reform process is now complete, with the withdrawal of funding approval, in 2022, for more than 5,000 qualifications at level 3 and below that had sustained no or low enrolments. However, we still have a confusing and duplicative landscape of at least 7,000 available qualifications at level 3 and below, which we are actively working to address through our current reform programme.

The second phase of our reforms is to remove 16-19 funding approval for qualifications that overlap with T Levels, which will reduce complexity for learners and employers. Thousands of young people who have completed T Levels have gone on to apprenticeships, jobs with top employers, and places at university. T Levels will be the backbone of the new Advanced British Standard, forming the foundation of the technical options. Core modules, occupational specialisms and industry placements will continue to be key features within the new qualification.

In March 2023, we published the updated final list of qualifications that overlap with waves 1 and 2 T Levels, which will have funding removed in August 2024, along with an equalities impact assessment. On 19 October 2023, we published the final overlap list of qualifications that overlap with wave 3 T Levels, which will have funding removed in August 2025. This equalities impact assessment accompanies that list.

We have now also commenced the third phase of current reforms, with the opening of the new integrated funding approval process in July 2023. Awarding organisations (AOs) can develop and submit new technical qualifications for funding, which are based on occupational standards approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, as long as the new technical qualifications do not overlap with T Levels. New qualifications will start to become available for first teach from August 2025. All technical qualifications will be linked to employer led standards and will ensure students develop the skills needed by employers, with clear pathways leading to good outcomes. A full list of approved qualifications at level 3 available for first teach in August 2025 will be published in May 2024.

This equalities impact assessment provides an overview of potential impacts resulting from the proposed removal of public funding approval from qualifications on the final wave 3 T Level overlap list for 16 to 19 year olds. Wave 3 covers the following T Levels:

- Maintenance, installation and repair

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- Engineering design and development
- Manufacturing, processing and control
- Accounting
- Finance
- Management and administration

A full list of the standards which are covered by the T Levels is contained in annex A.

Where students are identified as being disproportionately likely to be affected, this relates specifically to those who are more likely to be studying qualifications expected to have public funding approval removed for 16 to 19 year olds from qualifications on the final wave 3 T Level overlap list.

For the overall impact of the post-16 qualifications review at level 3, please refer to the impact assessment that was published last summer along with our policy statement and consultation response. The nature of these impacts are not repeated in this impact assessment, though some headline data is included for comparison.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Secretary of State has a duty to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The relevant 'protected characteristics' for the purposes of the Public Sector Equality Duty are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race (including ethnicity)
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

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Methodology

This section outlines the methodology behind the equalities impact assessment and provides the data underlying the figures shown in the document. This analysis provides a breakdown of learner characteristics for enrolments funded under the 16-19 study programme for qualifications on the final wave 3 overlap list, compared to all approved qualifications at level 3 and below.

Data and data sources

Qualifications

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) approves qualifications for government funding for students aged 14 to 19. The equalities impact assessment is based on a snapshot of qualifications approved for funding at level 3 or below as at May 2020.

Students

The equalities impact assessment uses enrolments funded under the 16-19[1] study programme. This includes enrolments for:

- 16-19 High Needs Students
- 16-19 Students (excluding high needs students)
- 19-24 Students with an EHCP
- 19+ Continuing Students (excluding EHCP)
- 14-16 Direct Funded Students

Student background information

Each qualification is linked to enrolment information for the full 2020/21 academic year. Enrolment information is taken from the Individualised Learner Record (ILR)[2] and the school census. The qualifications data is also linked with information on student characteristics. This comes from two sources:

1. The Young Persons Matched Administrative Dataset (YPMAD)[3] 2020/21 provides information on student characteristics as recorded in the school census at age 15. These include:

[1] Previously this analysis related to students aged between 16-18. This has been revised to use the 16-19 funded group as the proposed funding withdrawal is more relevant to this group.

[2] This is the information about students and the learning they undertake, in the further education (FE) and skills sector, that publicly funded colleges, training organisations, local authorities and employers (FE providers) must collect and return to the DfE. The ILR data source for this analysis is the final collection of 2020/21 and includes information on provision for the full academic year.

[3] This records information on the highest level of attainment and qualification studied each academic year matched to individual personal characteristics, as recorded in the school census at age 15.

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- Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility
- Special education needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Ethnic background

The YPMAD also provides information on prior GCSE or equivalent in English and maths where available.

2. The ILR provides characteristics information, mainly for the adult-funded groups who may not have data in the school census. Characteristics information in the ILR include ethnic background and learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD). These are self-reported so may not as reliable as the information from the YPMAD.

3. Data on level of deprivation is included for all ages. This is based on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), part of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). The index gives a score to each postcode area representing the proportion of children under 16 in each area who are income-deprived. Scores for students' home postcode areas are grouped into bands 1 (most deprived) to 5 (least deprived).

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Analysis of impacts

16 to 19 year olds

The following analysis relates to the final wave 3 T Level overlap list. A full breakdown of the characteristics of 16 to 19 year old enrolments at level 3 compared to those on qualifications which are on the final overlap list can be found in table 1 below. A breakdown of the number of 16 to 19 year old enrolments on each qualification on the final overlap list is published alongside this document.

Our assessment is broadly based on comparing the proportion of enrolments with protected characteristics on qualifications which are on the final overlap list to those qualifications available more broadly at level 3, excluding A levels. Our assessment excludes A levels, as they are outside of the scope of this review, and because the size and characteristics of the A level cohort would skew the comparison.

We have also provided the data from the equalities impact assessment published alongside our second stage consultation response, as a point of reference. This is contained in the final column of table 1 (below). This highlights our assessment on the impact to 16-19s from the overall changes we are making to the level 3 qualifications system. The assessment highlighted that students with SEND (special educational needs and disabilities), students from Asian ethnic groups, students from disadvantaged backgrounds and males were likely to be particularly affected by the reforms. It is not possible to draw direct comparisons as the methodology for the overall equalities impact assessment is different than that used to assess the potential impact of the removal of public funding from qualifications overlapping with wave 3 T Levels.

As shown in table 1 below, the following groups of people may be more affected by this stage of the reform process (wave 3) compared to previous analysis on the overall impact of removing public funding from qualifications as outlined in the second stage consultation impact assessment:

- Male students
- Black ethnic background
- SEND backgrounds
- EHCP (Education, health and care plan) backgrounds, and
- Disadvantaged backgrounds

This is because students with these characteristics are more highly represented on qualifications having their funding removed, than on qualifications at level 3 (excluding A levels) as a whole. However, students who would have likely studied the qualifications identified on the final overlap list will benefit in the future from the changes we are making

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to the post-16 qualifications offer at level 3. They will have access to high quality and rigorous T Levels as well as new qualifications which will include both revised technical qualifications which are much more closely linked to employers' needs, and alternative academic qualifications which can be studied as part of mixed programmes alongside A levels. These reforms will put students in a much stronger position to progress into skilled employment or continue to climb the ladder into higher education. As part of the improved content, T Levels also contain a meaningful industry placement of at least 45 days in a genuine workplace, equipping young people with key workbased skills, knowledge and experience necessary to access skilled employment or further technical study which isn't offered by current technical qualifications. Those who require additional support to progress to level 3 study will also have access to the T Level foundation year, providing a high-quality pathway onto T Levels.

	All level 3 qualifications	**All level 3 qualifications (excl. A levels)**	**Impact from removal of funding from qualifications on final wave 3 T Level overlap list**	**Overall impact at level 3 from removal of public funding (from second stage consultation response impact assessment)[4]**
16-19 enrolments	**2,145,600**	**659,300**	**17,600**	**356,000**
% Female	55%	53%	8%	46%
% White	67%	70%	70%	71%
% Mixed	5%	5%	4%	4%
% Asian (inc. Chinese)	14%	11%	11%	12%
% Black	6%	7%	8%	6%
% Other ethnic group	2%	2%	2%	2%
% Unknown ethnic group	6%	6%	5%	5%
% SEN Support at 15 (special education needs)	6%	9%	11%	9%

[4] The figures for the 'provisional' list are based on a previous methodology, that considered enrolments and characteristics for 16-18 year olds, rather than those funded through 16-19 study programmes. As such, they are not directly comparable.

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% EHCP at 15 (Education Health Care Plan)	1%	2%	2%	1%
% FSM (Free School Meals)	9%	13%	13%	12%
% IDACI 1 (Most disadvantaged)	18%	23%	27%	25%
% IDACI 2	19%	21%	22%	22%
% IDACI 3	19%	19%	19%	19%
% IDACI 4	20%	18%	17%	18%
% IDACI 5 (Least disadvantaged)	23%	17%	15%	16%

Table 1: 16 to 19 study programme enrolments characteristics at level 3, 2020/21

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Adults

The removal of public funding from qualifications that overlap with T Levels only applies to 16-19 enrolments. We have not therefore provided an assessment of the impact on adults, as qualifications on the final overlap list that are currently approved for adults will continue to be funded for adults in 2026. These qualifications are still subject to our future quality and other criteria.

We recognise that some AOs, and or providers, may no longer wish to offer some of these qualifications, given potential impacts on viability. However, notwithstanding our removal of funding from qualifications with low and no enrolments, we have seen that AOs can operate qualifications with very few, or even no ESFA funded enrolments, sometimes for many years. As such, this risk may be relatively minimal.

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